



The Chat

January 2023

CHAPTER MEETING

Tuesday, January 24

7:00 PM

Lions Field House - 270 Elkhorn Road (Hwy 67), Williams Bay, WI

Free and open to the public.

Featuring the following In-Person Badger Talk:

"Darwin and the Tree of Life"

By David Baum

Charles Darwin is most famous for proposing evolution by natural selection, but he is equally important for recognizing that living organisms are all connected as branches of the "Great Tree of Life." Over the last two decades scientists have come to appreciate that understanding the tree, "tree thinking," is essential to understand the natural world and humanity's place in it.

Speaker David A. Baum is Professor (and former Chair) in the Botany Department at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he conducts research in evolutionary biology, plant genetics, and the origin and early evolution of life. He obtained an undergraduate degree in Botany at Oxford University, a Ph.D. in Population and Evolutionary Biology from Washington University, and then conducted postdoctoral research at the University of Wisconsin. He served on the faculty of the Department of Organismic and Evolutionary Biology at Harvard University, earning tenure in 2000, before returning to the University of Wisconsin in 2001. Baum has published two books and >120 research publications and been awarded an Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Young Investigator Award, an NSF Career Award, a John Simon Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship, and was elected Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He teaches courses in introductory biology and evolution and was honored with the UW-Madison's Chancellor's Distinguished Teaching Award in 2015.



David A. Baum (UW-Madison)

Lake Geneva CBC Report

Our chapter conducts another successful count.

By Kyle Cudworth

The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) in our local Lake Geneva circle was held on Saturday, December 17, 2022 as part of Audubon's 123rd CBC. Our count circle of 7.5 miles radius is centered near the southwest corner of Lake Como. Weather on count day saw cloudy skies with temperatures in the 20's, light winds, with only a little snow on the ground. Larger lakes had little or no ice, but ponds and shallow lakes were mostly frozen.

This year about 22 local birders spent some or all of the day driving and hiking their assigned areas keeping careful track of how many birds of which species were seen, while seven additional birders watched their feeders and yards. Some did feeder watches as well as covering an area. Cumulatively, we spent nearly 90 hours birding, driving about 480 miles, and hiking over 18 miles, counting over 10000 birds. In all, 54 species were found on count day, plus four more during count week.

Feeder activity was rather slow, since the relatively little snow meant that many of the usual feeder birds could find food elsewhere. Goldfinches were notably sparse. As usual, Canada Geese were the most common species counted with about 2900 this year, compared to over 3000 last year, 1500 in 2020, and over 9000 in 2019. While the lack of snow cover could have kept birds away from feeders, it may also have allowed some migrants to stay around later than usual. In particular, an Eastern Bluebird and an Eastern Meadowlark were seen on count day and a Great Blue Heron and a Caroline Wren during count week.

In recent years we have seen at least a few Bald Eagles on count day, with 6 showing up this year. Some years we have had dozens of Pine Siskins on count day, but this year none were seen. A few other birds of note include many Horned Larks, Lapland Longspurs, and Snow Buntings (all often absent or rare on our count), as well as a Pileated Woodpecker that two of us were excited to watch for a few minutes. One Screech Owl and three Great Horned Owls were seen or heard.

Lisa Granbur organized things before the count and Kyle Cudworth is compiling the data for submission to Audubon. Counters included Wayne Rohde, the Mark Blacks, Jim Killian, the Brockmans, the Cudworth/Albrecht team, the Fritzmanns, the Tyksinskis, Pat Parsons, Lisa Granbur, the Dooleys, the Haases, Mary King, and Lynne Carpenter; as well as Jim Black, Kevin Dickey, Susan Seefeld, Joe Jacyna, Beth Goeppinger, Doug Mohr, and William McIntyre.

I humbly apologize to anyone I left off this list or whose name I spelled wrong. Participation in the CBC was a fun day of birding, and we would love to have some additional birders join the fun next year.

A pair of Bald Eagles seen on the shore of Delavan Lake during this year's CBC.
Photo by Wayne Rohde



Ornithology & Ethology

By Wayne Rohde

Ornithology, as all good Audubon folks know, is the study of birds. But what about ethology (not ecology, but ethology!)? Ethology is, to put it simply, the study of animal behavior - including that of bird behavior.

Although spring and summer are the ideal time to study the nesting behavior of birds, winter provides some of our best opportunities to witness their feeding behavior ... and to do so up close and personal in our own back yards. Birders have made countless observations about the feeding preferences concerning seed type (e.g., sunflower seed, Nyjer seed), feeder location (e.g., elevated feeders, ground feeders), etc. Yet a study of avian behavior goes above and beyond these initial and elementary considerations. And in this brief article I'd like to suggest an ethology starter list to increase our enjoyment of birds.

First, pay attention to the fact that the range of species which visit our yards may vary through the years. Some birds, like siskins and crossbills, are irruptive in their travels; others, like redpolls, are cyclical. Their movements from year to year can be dictated by food supply. Accordingly, the species which are present one year may be absent other years, and *vice versa*. In addition, mild winters may entice more southerly birds to stay the winter, whereas severe winters may drive more northerly birds toward our area. And speaking of weather, have you ever noticed how a great many birds seem to go on a feeding frenzy at our feeders just prior to a snowstorm, as if they can anticipate its imminent arrival? In addition, the natural phenomenon known as succession also accounts for different mixes of species in the same area over time. The growth of trees and shrubs, for example, affects the various kinds of birds which are present.

Second, consider the changes which occur within the span of a single day. Have you noticed that some birds, such as cardinals, arrive at our feeders earlier in the day and tarry later in the day than others? Or does it seem that some species are more easily spooked than others, such that a few wary species might leave a feeding area before others when frightened, and return to feed only after others do? And have you watched birds "freeze" in place for several minutes when a predator, such as a Cooper's Hawk, stops by for a meal? Have you noted how smaller birds react to feisty jays or pesky squirrels? And how do the birds behave in the presence of people and traffic? Do jays and crows act like sentinels to patrol our yards and warn fellow birds of perceived danger?

Third, look for interactions between members of the same species, as well as interactions between different species. Some individuals can be distinguished by details in their feathering, and in several cases it's fairly easy to distinguish adults and juveniles, males and females. Have you discerned any pecking order between the birds, based on age or gender or condition? Do you chuckle when you see how tenacious our smallest winter birds, like Black-capped Chickadees and Red-breasted Nuthatches, can be, and how they can "hold their own" against the larger birds?

Finally, ask questions and seek answers. Take time to wonder, "What's going on here?" with respect to this or that behavior. Birds are excellent communicators, and I'm pretty sure many birds come to our feeders because other birds let them know they've found a good source of food. Are some species, like chickadees, especially adept at alerting others to the presence of food? Do they act as scouts? Do they guide the rest? Are they rewarded for their service? And have you detected a change in vocalizations as spring approaches, when birds are readying themselves to push north again for the nesting season? Have you heard the Dark-eyed Juncos and American Tree Sparrows start to sing their sweet spring and summer tunes when winter's cold winds give way to warm breezes out of the south?

We already know volumes about birds and their behavior, but there's still much to learn. If you've not done so yet, make birding a life-long, enjoyable adventure by taking the next step in your education: the ethology step.

Planting for Wildlife

Native Plant Spotlight

By Mariette Nowak

Red Cedar and Shrub Junipers *Juniperus species*, Cypress family (Cupressaceae)

"I would rate the tree forms of juniper as among the 10 essential plants to include in a bird friendly landscape."
William Cullina. Native Trees Shrubs and Vines.

Junipers are hardy, drought tolerant plants, often under-appreciated, despite their great value to an amazing variety of birds, insects, and other wildlife. Red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) is a tree and, although referred to as a cedar, it is a juniper species with beautiful reddish wood and would be better named "red juniper". The most widespread shrub junipers are the common juniper (*Juniperus communis*) and trailing juniper (*Juniperus horizontalis*). Value to Birds and Other Wildlife A bevy of birds feed on juniper's berry-like cones, which are fairly rich in both carbohydrates and fats. The "berries" are especially important as a winter food for birds. The cedar waxwing is the most voracious feeder of the cones and has even been named after the tree. Other birds especially fond of the berries include: the American robin, eastern bluebird, eastern phoebe, evening grosbeak, northern mockingbird, pine grosbeak, purple finch, and yellow-rumped warbler. The yellow-bellied sapsucker feeds on the sap.

Many other birds also feed on the berry-like cones including, the alder flycatcher, American crow, black-capped chickadee, blue jay, brown thrasher, chipping sparrow, cliff swallow, common grackle, eastern kingbird, fish crow, fox sparrow, gray catbird, hermit thrush, mourning dove, northern bobwhite, northern cardinal, northern flicker, ring-necked pheasant, ruffed grouse, Swainson's thrush, tree swallow, white-throated sparrow, white-winged crossbill, wild turkey, and the non-native European starling.

Most birds, like robins, jays, and mockingbirds pick off the berries, toss their heads back and swallow them whole, but black-capped chickadees are said to pick out the seeds and let the pulp fall off.

Birds also use junipers for nesting. I found this is especially true in spring when deciduous trees are not yet leafed out. Species partial to red cedar as a nesting site include the American robin, blue jay, brown thrasher, cedar waxwing, chipping sparrow, common grackle, Cooper's hawk, field sparrow, house finch, northern mockingbird, northern cardinal, pine warbler, prairie warbler, and song sparrow. The chipping sparrow and northern cardinal also nest in shrub, common juniper. I myself have enjoyed doves, cardinals, and jays nesting in my red cedars; a cardinal nested, as well, in my common juniper shrub. The evergreen boughs of junipers also offer protective cover and roosting sites for birds, especially sparrows. and owls.

Mariette Nowak is an avid native plant gardener and current President of the Kettle Moraine Wild Ones Chapter. She has a Master's degree in Botany and Zoology. Was also the Director of Wehr Nature Center for many years; former WSO Education Chair; former Editor of Lakeland Audubon's newsletter and author of *Birdscaping in the Midwest: A Guide to Gardening with Native Plants to Attract Birds*.



Eastern Red Cedar's berry-like cones.

Chapter Field Trip

Tuesday, February 7, 2023

10:00 AM - 2:00 PM

Natureland County Park - W8338 Territorial Road, Whitewater, WI

This event is free to attend.

Join us for an outing at Natureland County Park. This field trip will consist of a significant amount of hiking in winter weather, so please dress appropriately. Winter finches will be the target species. Meet in the main parking lot on north side of Territorial Road (you will see the sign) shortly before 10:00 AM. If you are interested in going, please contact us.

[Contact - Lakeland Audubon Society](#) Call or Text: (262) 729-9702

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Bird Walks

Saturdays

11:00 AM - 1:00 PM

Big Foot Beach State Park

N1550 S Lakeshore Drive, Lake Geneva, WI

Meet in the main parking area to the right of the entrance station a little before 11:00 AM. A state park sticker (\$28, \$13 if age 65 or older) or daily pass (\$8, \$3 if age 65 or older) is required to enter Big Foot Beach State Park.

Please contact us to let us know you are interested in attending a walk.

<https://lakelandaudubon.com/contact>

Call or Text: (262) 729-9702



Greater Scaup - Milwaukee Lakeshore. Photo by Janice Bain.

The Chat is the newsletter of the Lakeland Audubon Chapter of the National Audubon Society, P.O. Box 473, Elkhorn, WI 53121. Subscription is \$15 per year for printed copies sent by US mail.